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FOR EAP/MTS AND G/IWI

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SUBJECT: EMBASSY DILI NOMINATION FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMAN OF COURAGE

REF: STATE 99729

¶1. (SBU) Embassy Dili is proud to nominate Sister Guilhermina Marcal as an International Woman of Courage. Sister Guilhermina is the manager of Canossa Balide camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). When Timor-Leste erupted in crisis May 2006, hundreds of residents of the Balide neighborhood of Dili flocked to the compound of the Canossian Sisters seeking refuge.

Normally a training centre for nuns, the compound has at times housed up to 8,000 people driven from their homes by violence.

¶2. (SBU) In her months running the camp, Sister Guilhermina has worked miracles in terms of ensuring adequate supplies in terms of food, water, clothing, shelter. She has not simply relied on distribution of supplies from local humanitarian relief agencies. When provisions of shelter, food, and other supplies ran short, Sister G would import containers of materials through her international church connections. She did not hesitate to put all the resources of her religious order at the disposal of those in need: at one point she used the annual budget allocated to her library in order to buy extra food supplies for the people taking refuge in the IDP centre.

¶3. (SBU) In contrast to other IDP camps in Timor-Leste, the Canossian Sisters' compound has never been troubled by criminal activity or gangs. No one enters the compound armed; Sister Guilhermina has strictly enforced a policy of surrendering weapons as a price of entry, and on the occasions where some have violated this rule, she has personally confiscated their weapons.

¶4. (SBU) Sister Guilhermina is a recognized force for reconciliation and dialogue in the Balide neighborhood, which remains racked by gang conflict. On several occasions, she has put herself in harm's way during pitched gang battles, encouraging those fighting to cease. She has also initiated dialogue processes that resulted in warring gangs signing binding peace agreements.

¶5. (SBU) Unusually in a male-dominated society, Sister Guilhermina has never hesitated to speak truth to power. She is an outspoken advocate for the weak and oppressed, and never hesitates to draw attention to their plight even at the risk of rattling the complacency or even incurring the antagonism of those in positions of authority. 6. (SBU) Embassy Dili believes that this record qualifies Sister Guilhermina for consideration as an International Woman of Courage.

RECTOR